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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes that the study of schooling would benefit from more research that is social in nature. The characteristics of social research are described in terms of three dimensions--the extent to which "context" and "interaction" of phenomena are considered and the degree to which "participant conceptions" are incorporated in description and interpretation. Social classroom research is described as contextualized, interactive/dynamic, and sensitive to participant conceptions. Recent social studies classroom research is cited to illustrate these characteristics. The paper also explores the potential of classroom research that is social in its assumptions and questions, methodology, interpretations, and implications in relation to the development of a research base for social studies education and use of research derived knowledge. Educators should work toward creating an evolving, heuristic research base. New research should not merely add to what already exists but facilitate refinement, extension, or revision of present knowledge. Explanatory potential would be a major criterion of research value. With regard to the use of research derived knowledge, the paper suggests that instead of asking how useful research is or might become, it would be more fruitful to ask how research might be used and to consider interpretive as well as instrumental uses of research derived knowledge. (RM)

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On the Social Study of Social Studies*

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Abstract

In order to reflect the social character of schooling, it is proposed that school research be social research, i.e., contextualized, interactive/dynamic, and sensitive to participant conceptions. To explore the possibilities and limitations of the social study of social studies, the notion of social research is delineated, using recent social studies classroom research that is social in nature as illustration. Social study is then considered in relation to the development of a research base for social studies education and the use of research based knowledge.

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On the Social Study of Social Studies

Schooling is a social activity. It is my premise that research into the conditions, processes, and effects of teaching and learning in schools should be social research and, more specifically, that social studies education and research would benefit from more social ways of thinking about society and research and of investigating and interpreting schooling and social studies (see Clements, 1981b). For the most part, however, the assumptions and practices adopted by social studies and other educational researchers have been asocial.[1]

Educational research has been "coming out of the laboratory closet" and into the "natural" social setting of the classroom (Leinhardt, 1978). But, the move has been accompanied by efforts to make a closet out of the classroom by decontextualizing it, that is, by examining classroom phenomena in isolation from one another and their institutional, societal, and historical settings (Mishler, 1979). Consequently, the ecological validity and value of much classroom research has been unnecessarily limited (Doyle & Ponder, 1975). While classrooms are no more natural settings than are subways or skyscrapers (see Hamilton, 1981, on the evolution of the classroom system),

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classroom research does seem to hold promise for manageable and meaningful social study.

To describe schooling as a social activity and propose that the study of schooling reflect its social character, i.e., a social perspective, assumes mutual influence among school phenomena and between schools and larger social structures. Further, people in schools are seen as jointly creating and acting on meanings or definitions of their situations as they interact over time. A social perspective thus rejects oversocialized notions of human thought and action, instead viewing teachers, students, and others as creators as well as consumers, transmitters, and, perhaps, victims of their milieux.

The purposes of the present inquiry are to (a) delineate characteristics of social research with particular reference to classroom research, (b) identify examples of recent social studies classroom research that are social in nature, and (c) explore the possibilities and limitations of the social study of social studies.

Social versus Asocial Classroom Research

Classroom research is defined as systematic inquiry about school classrooms that is directed toward understanding classroom processes. It is usually but not necessarily conducted in classrooms.[2] Such research can employ various methods -- historical, philosophical, experimental, survey, empirical, ethnographic -- or combinations

of methodologies.[3] Social studies classroom research would include studies of social studies classrooms or other (e.g., "self-contained" elementary) classrooms with reference to social studies concerns.

Tentative distinctions between social and asocial classroom research were derived from the literature in social psychology, sociology, and social inquiry. Particularly helpful were Bronfenbrenner (1976), Mishler (1979), and Popkewitz (1981) on social contexts, Mills (1959) and Waller (1932) on social study, and Bellack (1978) and Magoon (1977) on interpretive-constructivist research. Initial conceptions were refined in the process of examining classroom studies and the interpretive literature on classroom research and teaching (e.g., Doyle, 1977, 1979; Gump, 1971; Popkewitz & Wehlage, 1977; Westbury, 1973, 1978).

Characteristics distinguishing social and asocial classroom research are viewed as dimensions along which studies might vary. These dimensions are context, interaction, and participant conceptions -- the extent to which phenomena of interest are contextualized, considered as dynamic and interacting, and interpreted in relation to participant conceptions.

Context

Contextualized study of social studies education attends to one or more of the contexts of social studies teaching and learning. In terms of classroom research,

attention is directed to the contexts of social studies classroom instruction. Context can be conceptualized and partitioned in a number of ways. Here, context is used in its everyday, dictionary sense of the "situation, background, or environment relevant to a particular event, personality, creation, etc." (Webster's New World Dictionary, Second College Edition, 1974, p. 307) where environment consists of the "conditions, circumstances, and influences surrounding, and affecting the development of, an organism or group of organisms" (p. 468).

Contexts vary in direction and extent of impact as well as scope (situation specific to universal) and stability (short-lived to external). They can be distinguished by size, structure, and substance. The appropriateness of one or another means of distinguishing among contexts depends on the purpose and focus of study, i.e., contexts of what? Rather than attempt to taxonomize context, the intent here is to suggest contexts that seem relevant to social studies classroom instruction and how they might be studied.

Physical and temporal contexts are often distinguished from social contexts, even though physical settings are socially constructed, and time and history are socially interpreted. In addition to characteristics such as the variety and technology of classroom space, facilities, and materials, physical contexts might be examined in terms of their availability, arrangement, access, use, purpose and

meanings. In a case study of the role of curriculum materials in elementary social studies instruction, for example, the activities associated with materials use as well as the physical and substantive characteristics of the materials were examined on the premise that the meaning and impact of curriculum materials depend on how they are used by teachers and students (Cornbleth, 1982). King's (1980) ethnographic study describes the availability, arrangement, and access to "play" materials in kindergarten classrooms and vividly illustrates their use, meanings, and social functions.

Temporal context refers not only to amount of time allocated or actually used for instruction, or whether it is morning or afternoon, but also to the sequence and pacing of events during and across instructional segments (see Arlin, 1979; Gump, 1971; Kounin, 1970). Further, classrooms exist in the context of a particular historical period (e.g., colonial, Cold War, post-industrial), which likely influences what is taught and learned and how. The examination of controversial issues and the development of political beliefs are but two illustrations of social studies concerns that seem particularly susceptible to history. Classrooms also have histories of their own. What happens at one point in time sets precedents for and affects subsequent events.

Social contexts include overlapping interpersonal (e.g., dyadic, group), institutional (e.g., school, school

district, state legislature and department of education-instruction), community (e.g., parents, local organizations), and societal (e.g., values, political movements) contexts. These contexts incorporate elements pertinent to both the academic and social aspects of schooling and classroom instruction.[4]

Interpersonal contexts frame individual behavior. Interpersonal behavior, even at the dyadic level, is not merely a function of individual attributes (e.g., age, sex, ethnicity, I.Q., reading level), time, and place.[5] Suggestive of strategies and outcomes of examining interpersonal contexts are ethnographic and sociolinguistic studies of face-to-face interaction (e.g., Gearing & Sangree, 1979; Green & Wallat, 1981; McDermott, 1977; Mehan, 1978). Goffman (1964), for example, details the "neglected situation," arguing that interpersonal interactions, such as those between a teacher and one or more students, constitute social situations with distinguishing cultural characteristics and structures. They are not merely sequences of verbal and nonverbal behavior. "Cultural rules establish how individuals are to conduct themselves...and these rules for comingling...socially organize the behavior of those in the situation" (Goffman, 1964, p. 135). In other words, interpersonal interactions are social contexts that shape the behavior of participants; understanding observed interpersonal behavior requires identification of the operative cultural rules. And,

these cultural rules are generated, in part, by the participants. At the interpersonal level, "social contexts consist of mutually shared and ratified definitions of situation" (Erickson & Shultz, 1981, p. 148) as well as the actions that participants take on the basis of their definitions (see Stebbins, 1975; Waller, 1932).

Classroom activities, for example, are fruitfully viewed as settings for both social and cognitive teaching and learning. Moving beyond allocated social studies instructional time (Smith, 1979), time on task and time spent in various activities in social studies classes (Cornbleth & Korth, 1980a; Herman, 1977; Stodolsky, 1979), social research would consider the teaching-learning opportunities and constraints afforded by specific activity contexts (Korth & Cornbleth, 1982; Stodolsky, Ferguson, & Wimpelberg, 1981). In an experimental study of 11th and 12th grade social studies classes, Smith (1980) examined student conceptions, on-task behavior, and achievement in different concept discussion contexts. His findings that student commitment to discussion and two forms of attentiveness varied with the discussion context suggest that more attention might well be paid to the underlying structures of classroom activities.

Consider, for example, a social studies recitation consisting of teacher question-student response-teacher reaction interactions, occasionally interspersed with teacher elaboration of important points and teacher reprimands

to students deemed inattentive or uncooperative. Typically, the situation or interpersonal context is mutually defined as one in which the teacher controls the interaction as director and judge while the student's role is a passive, dependent one of complying with teacher demands in order to obtain a favorable evaluation. The differential status of teacher and student in these exchanges is evident in their respective rights and responsibilities. The teacher as questioner has the right to determine the topic and how it is to be pursued, to speak at any time, to select other participants and terminate their participation. The students have the obligation to respond when requested and to remain quietly cooperative and receptive at other times. If students resist or challenge these implicit or explicit rules, teachers tend to assert their authority or employ coercive power in an effort to regain control of the interaction. Occasionally, however, students are successful in negotiating a redefinition of the situation and altering the rules guiding interaction such as whether they must raise their hands and wait for the teacher's permission to speak (Copeland, 1980; also, see Martin, 1976).

In sum, classroom research is contextualized to the extent that it considers the physical, temporal, and social contexts of the phenomena of interest, including the interrelationships and mutual influences among them. Contextualization of social studies classroom research goes beyong detailing samples and settings (e.g., Shaver & Norton,

1980) to consider what difference contexts seem to make. Apparent tensions and discrepancies or conflicts might also be explored insofar as they may provide impetus for change. Classroom research is abstracted when it involves examination of phenomena (such as teacher questions or student time-on-task) out of context as if they were independent of time, place, and social location (see Cronbach, 1975; Mills, 1959). To ignore the multiple contexts of schooling is to obscure or misrepresent its social origins and nature. Social activities, including schooling, are "context dependent and can only be understood within their contexts" (Mishler, 1979, p.2).

Interaction and Participant Conceptions

The interaction and participant conceptions dimensions of social classroom research are implicit in the notion of context just elaborated. Interactive study of social studies classrooms attends to the interactions among classroom phenomena and their contexts.[6] For example, students and teachers interact with curriculum materials, which are part of their physical environment, and with one another, which constitutes their immediate interpersonal setting. Together, these interactions shape the use of curriculum materials and how students and teachers relate to each other. Social study minimizes the fragmentation of classroom elements that distorts conceptualizations of classroom conditions, events, and outcomes.

Interactive studies also tend to be dynamic, portraying

the flow of interaction and change over time. Rather than present a classroom snapshot, researchers follow and attempt to account for emerging trends and patterns. In contrast are studies that examine classroom phenomena at one point in time or average observations across occasions. Recent studies of how teachers and students begin the school year (e.g., Emmer, Evertson, & Anderson, 1980) indicate that classrooms do not simply exist but are created anew each year or semester, suggesting the desirability of classroom research that is dynamic rather than static. Future studies might move beyond classroom management concerns to consider how teachers and students create the academic and social curricula of their classrooms.

Participant conceptions include their meanings and purposes, i.e., their definitions of classroom situations and their goals in these situations. How classroom participants define a situation influences their actions, which, in turn, can serve to modify or sustain both the situation and their definition of it. Differential teacher expectations and treatment of students in ways that are self-fulfilling are one illustration of the interaction of participant conceptions and classroom events. Another is provided by Goldenson's (1978) study of the effects of an experimental curriculum unit on senior high school students' attitudes toward civil liberties. He found that attitude changes associated with the civil liberties unit were mediated by students' perceptions of teacher credibility;

positive attitude change was greater when students perceived the teacher as fair, knowledgeable, concerned, interesting, and understandable.[7]

The importance of incorporating participant conceptions into classroom research is based on assumptions that behavior is purposeful and that outsiders (e.g., researchers) cannot adequately interpret the actions of insiders (e.g., teachers, students) without access and attention to their meanings and purposes as well as to the contexts and interactive course of observed behavior. Teachers and students do what they do because they see their actions as serving desired ends. Their activity might seem absurd (or worse) to the observer unacquainted with their conceptions of the situation in question. In a study of students' involvement with school work, Laffey (1980) found that 10th grade social studies students' "constructions," i.e., their assessments of classroom situations, were associated with observed and reported involvement. While he concluded that "the student's understanding of the class situation provides a base of action, helping to explain the intensity and frequency of classroom behavior" (p. 16), it is also likely that classroom and other events affected students' constructions.

Consideration of participant conceptions in social research avoids dichotomizing thought and action. Particularly useful in this regard is the concept of perspective developed by Becker, Geer, Hughes, and Strauss (1961).

Whereas constructs, theories, and ideologies, like attitudes and values, tend to be abstracted from particular situations and assumed to exist apart from actions, perspecitives are situation specific, incorporating both ideas and actions and the relations among them. Perspectives also tend to be complex, consisting of more than a single belief-action pairing. The substance of a perspective includes one's definition of the situation and the problem(s) it presents, one's purposes or goals under these circumstances, and the ideas and actions employed toward reaching desired goals. Perspectives indicate how individuals interpret and thus create their environments and how they react to or act on them (see Argyris & Schön, 1974; Bussis, Chittenden, & Amarel, 1976).

Boag and Massey (1981), for example, have illustrated how the perspectives of two elementary teachers mediated social studies curriculum change proposals. Attention to teacher and other participant perspectives and how they are socially constructed would seem to enhance understanding of classroom processes and of possibilities for change. Social study incorporates the context of meanings within which participants act and considers participant conceptions in their larger social contexts. It

> allow[s] one to understand how people's conceptions shape their behaviour, and how such conceptions and behaviour change over time

> in an evolving process of interaction
> . . . the dialectical process of how
> people create the very social structures
> that in turn shape them. (West, 1975, p. 36)

Possibilities and Limitations of Social Study

It was proposed that the study of schooling would benefit from more research that is social in nature. The characteristics of social research were described in terms of three dimensions -- the extent to which context and interaction of phenomena are considered and the degree to which participant conceptions are incorporated in description and interpretation. Social classroom research was described as contextualized, interactive/dynamic, and sensitive to participant conceptions, and recent social studies classroom research was cited to illustrate these characteristics.

Of the social studies classroom research published in the last five years (fewer than 30 studies were located), a majority of studies tend toward the asocial on all three dimensions. However, although few in number, there are social studies of social studies education. In addition to those already cited, examples of social classroom research include (a) large scale projects such as the Case Studies in Science Education (Stake & Easley, 1978); (b) a study of first graders' sex role knowledge and behavior in relation to community, teacher-school, and curriculum contexts

that incorporates participant conceptions (Goetz, 1981); (c) a study of elementary teachers' planning for social studies in relation to institutional context, including both formal and informal policies, that incorporates participant conceptions (McCutchan, 1981); and (d) a study of the social construction and functions of knowledge about other cultures in elementary social studies classes (White, 1980).

What, then, seem to be the limitations and possibilities of the social study of social studies? The potential of classroom research that is social in its assumptions and questions, methodology, interpretations and implications is explored in relation to the development of a research base for social studies education and the use of research derived knowledge.

A Research Base

Given the complexity of social research, social classroom research will not rapidly add to the present knowledge base for social studies education. Social research is resource intensive, particularly with respect to time and imagination. White's (1980) study of the creation and use of knowledge about other cultures in kindergarten through sixth grade classes, for example, involved four years of data collection, and most of the data were not amenable to computerized analysis.

The time and other costs of social classroom research are serious limitations if one conceives of a research

base as additive or cumulative. Whether the research is social or asocial, however, research derived facts and generalizations decay over time (see Cronbach, 1975), and attempting to accumulate an adequate research base is akin to the endless labors of Sisyphus who, doomed to push a heavy rock up a steep hill, found that it forever rolled back down again. To pursue a cumulative research base implies that explanatory concepts, principles, and theories are generated from data, which does not appear to be the case (e.g., Phillips, 1980). Productive scientific inquiry, social or otherwise, does not involve testing all known variables in all possible combinations, thereby stockpiling findings that might someday come together in a grand theory.

Instead of seeking to amass research derived information for social studies education, it would seem more fruitful to work toward creating an evolving, heuristic research base (see Confrey, 1981). New research should not merely add to what already exists but facilitate refinement, extension, or revision of present knowledge. This orientation implies that what is needed is not simply more research or more technically sophisticated research but more powerful, theory generated research, powerful in the sense that it enables us "to develop explanatory concepts, concepts that will help people use their heads" (Cronbach, 1975, p. 126). Explanatory potential would be a major criterion of research value (see Magoon, 1977). If a research base is viewed as evolving rather than cumulative, a social perspective offers considerable promise, both for reinterpreting

already available data and for suggesting questions to guide future research.

As an illustration, consider the evidence of continuing textbook-based social studies instruction in which the narrative text largely defines the content and means of instruction. How is this evidence to be interpreted? A social perspective suggests an examination of (a) textbook instruction in context both within and beyond the classroom, (b) interaction among teachers, students, textbooks, and settings, and (c) conceptions of the participants in textbook instruction. When this was attempted, it was found, among other things, that textbooks and their accompanying recitations serve socialization and control as well as instructional purposes (e.g., Shaver, Davis, & Helburn, 1978; Westbury, 1973). Moving beyond documentation of events, differences, and correlations to begin to understand how and why events and patterns occur and persist, one might more directly investigate how knowledge is constituted and distributed in social studies classrooms, how the social order of the classroom is constructed, and how knowledge and social order are intertwined (see Clements, 1981a). In the process, one might also being to question what has previously been taken-for-granted, e.g., that adding to teachers' subject matter knowledge or repertoire of teaching strategies will substantially alter their classroom practices.

Use of Research Derived Knowledge

There appears to be a widespread if implicit assumption that research findings should be instrumentally useful (e.g., Shaver, 1979). In other words, useful research is taken to be that which indicates presciptions, preferably broadly applicable ones, for instructional practice. By this criterion, social studies and other educational research has not been notably useful. Even when findings have been deemed sufficiently convincing to support prescription, the prescriptions have often been rejected by teachers as unworkable or tried and found not to work as expected.

Because of its recognition of context, interaction, and participant constructions, social classroom research is unlikely to offer instrumental utility except in very limited circumstances. Instead of asking how useful research is or might become, it seems more fruitful to ask how research might be used and to consider interpretive as well as instrumental uses of research derived knowledge. This suggestion dates at least to Dewey (1929), who admonished that "no conclusion of scientific research can be converted into an immediate rule of educational art" (p. 19), and Waller (1932), who argued that school studies should help teachers gain social insight, i.e., "insight into the social realities of school life" that can enhance their observation and interpretation of events in their own classrooms. This notion has recently been echoed by prominent mainstream educational researchers. Cronbach (1975), for example, proposes that

research derived generalizations be treated as working hypotheses (rather than conclusions or probabilistic universals) to be tested in particular situations such that effects are observed and interpreted in context. Similarly, with respect to research on teaching, Good and Power (1976)

> suspect that generalizations derived from classroom research . . . function not as predictors of future events but as guidelines for understanding particular situations or contexts . . . as guides to assessing the likely consequences of alternative strategies in complex educational situations. But this does not decrease their value for the teacher . . . Theories can be of value in specifying those dimensions which are relevant to an understanding of classroom phenomena, can extend the range of hypotheses (alternative strategies) considered, and sensitize the teacher to the possible consequences of his [sic] actions. (p. 47)

Recently, Fenstermacher (1980) distinguished three possible uses of research on teaching in school practice, which he termed rules, evidence, and schemata. Rules, converting research results into directions for teachers to follow, describe the instrumentalist position. Evidence, using research results to test one's beliefs about teaching, is similar to Cronbach's view and that of Good and

Power. Schemata, using research to provide a conceptual framework for interpreting classroom events and enlarging one's knowledge and understanding of classroom phenomena, comes closest to the suggestions of Dewey and Waller. Rules cast the practitioner as a passive technician whereas evidence and schemata encourage active, reflective, and responsible practitioner, including researcher, roles.[8] If the usefulness of research is viewed in terms of evidence and schemata rather than rules, then social research seems to offer rich possibilities, but no panaceas, for social studies education.

From a social perspective, it appears that disappointment with social studies research may well be a function of inappropriate expectations and the asocial nature of much of that research.

Notes

1. See, for example, Chanan (1976) and Popkewitz (1978). Interestingly, some of the most cogent recent criticisms of asocial orientations have come from within psychology. See Sarason (1981) on clinical psychology and Sampson (1981) on cognitive psychology.
2. Research conducted in classrooms is not necessarily classroom research. For example, a number of studies conducted in classrooms offer little or no explication of classroom processes. Other than surveys, most represent efforts to assess or compare the effects on students of one or more curricula. These studies typically provide a few demographic characteristics of the sample and setting, a description of the intended treatment(s), and detailed analyses of student scores; they provide little basis for explanation of how or why the treatments did (not) show the expected effects.
3. See Shulman (1981), on modes of disciplined inquiry, and Bellack (1978), for a comparative analysis of approaches to research on teaching. On social methodologies in school and classroom research, see Magoon (1977), Ogbu (1981), and Popkewitz and Tabachnick (1981).
4. Warren (1975) found little evidence that the organizational (school and school district mandates and procedures) and sociocultural (parent and community expectations) contexts of teaching he examined directly influenced classroom teaching in an elementary school

and concluded that teachers operate in contextual isolation. However, he seems to have (a) relied on official or public statements more than the everyday interactions of teachers, specialists, and administrators, and (b) sought evidence of external contextual influence on individual teachers rather than condering the possibility of an interactive teacher context. In contrast, Popkewitz (1981) provides evidence from an evaluation of IGE schools suggesting the power of pedagogical, occupational, and sociocultural contexts of schooling. Also, see Popkewitz, Tabachnick, and Wehlage (1982). On institutional context, see Popkewitz (1979) and, in social studies, Larkins and Oldham (1976). On community context and social studies, see Anyon (1980, 1981).

5. Social psychologists have long been critical of conceptualizations of classroom teaching-learning processes based on the assumption of direct teacher to student influence by means of discrete dyadic interactions. Instead of an "islands of teacher-pupil pairs" model, Glick (1968), for example, suggests a peer group mediational model of classroom processes. While elaborating the interpersonal context and arguing that "contextual variables" not be considered merely in terms of how they affect individual teacher-student interactions, his notion of social context does not extend beyond the classroom group. Nor does he consider how social contexts

come into being. Even modest proposals such as this, however, seem to have been ignored by most school researchers of the 1960s and 1970s (Doyle, 1977).

6. From an environmental psychology perspective, Barker (1963), for example, has elaborated the mutual influences among what he calls nested settings or contexts. Any one

> both constrains and is constrained by the outside unit that surrounds it and by the inside units it surrounds. This means that entities in nesting structures are parts of their own contexts; they influence themselves through the circumjacent entities which they, in part, compose . . . a word defines itself by its contribution to the meaning of the sentence of which it is a part. (p. 16)

Also, see Bronfenbrenner (1976).

7. Also, see Morgan (1979), who incorporated participant conceptions in identifying and attempting to account for relationships between teaching patterns and students' "sense of purposeful involvement" in secondary social studies classes; Ehman (1980), who examined students' perceptions of social studies classroom climate with respect to the inclusion and treatment of controversial issues in relation to their political attitudes from sophomore to senior years; and Cornbleth and Korth (1980b),

who investigated social studies and science teachers' initial perceptions of their (black and white, male and female) students in relation to subsequent student behavior and teacher-student interaction (but did not directly examine (a) context factors or aspects of teacher perspectives that might mediate classroom expression of differential perceptions, or (b) change over time in teacher perceptions).

8. As one illustration of the promise of a heuristic research base and the interpretive use of research by researchers, see White's (1981) proposal for an ecological model of the construction of classroom lessons.

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